

VII. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY DIAGNOSIS PROCESS IN HAMILTON COUNTY

As early as 1994, leaders in the health field in Hamilton County began openly to discuss the many changes that were becoming evident in the health indicators for the population of Hamilton County regarding health and health-related resources and health care financing. During the last quarter of 1994, community leaders and several executives from local hospitals and the health department began to meet on regular occasions to talk about the health status of the community.

During the first quarter of 1995, before formal “community development” initiatives were launched statewide by the Bureau of Health, key players representing the business community, higher education, health insurer groups, and others joined the small group of leaders who had been convened earlier to review and discuss the health status of the community. Their discussions were motivated by a growing interest in determining the health needs of our County residents and the need to identify resources that are required to address those needs.

The *Metropolitan Council for Community Services* convened the necessary groups to move forward the review of health needs and the identification of resources. This agency is recognized locally as the primary technical resource for facilitating community-wide research initiatives and planning in areas inclusive of social and community services, health, and economic and community development. These community leaders were then formally organized by the Metropolitan Council to form the *Greater Chattanooga Community Health Task Force*, (referred to herein after as the Community Health Task Force or Task Force). The purpose of this Task Force was to initiate efforts that would result in an improvement in the health of the residents of Hamilton County.

The assessment process conducted by the Community Health Task force included the analysis of data and information gathered from three sources: (1) a community profile analysis as documented by Metropolitan Council for Community Services in their research report entitled “Life in Hamilton County: Indicators of Community Well-Being,” (2) an inventory of health resources and services, and (3) a telephone survey of 816 adults, age 18 and over, from randomly selected households in Hamilton County.

The findings that emerged from the analysis of data and information led the Task Force to conclude that *personal choices and decisions*, and *the behavior of people* are the primary determinants of premature death among residents of Hamilton County. These conclusions prompted the Task Force to establish a two-fold strategy to improve health among area residents: (1) *reduce risks*, and (2) *expand opportunities*.